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A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

OFFICERS AND MEMBERS

OF THE

HUMANE SOCIETY

OF

MASSACHUSETTS,

11. JUNE, 1811.

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1811

BY LEMUEL SHAW.

BOSTON:
FROM THE PRESS OF JOHN ELIOT, JUN.

1811.

16,237
Chas H. West.
Jan 6. 1857

AT the semiannual Meeting of the HUMANE SOCIETY, June 11, 1811.

Voted, That Hon. GEORGE CABOT, AARON DEXTER, M. D. Hon. WILLIAM TUDOR, Hon. WILLIAM SPOONER, WILLIAM PHILLIPS, Esq. CHARLES DAVIS Esq. and the Rev. Dr. ELIOT be a committee to wait upon LEMUEL SHAW, Esq. and return him the thanks of this Society for his excellent discourse, delivered this day, and to request of him a copy for the press.

CHARLES DAVIS, *Recording Secretary.*

DISCOURSE.

IN considering the various topics, which the recurrence of this anniversary naturally, and almost necessarily suggests, topics, which learning, genius and eloquence, have so often delighted to decorate, and to enrich, you, my friends, will hardly, I hope, do me the injustice to expect much originality of design, or novelty of illustration. I can hope to do little more than retrace impressions, already deeply engraven on your minds, or once more to touch the same chords, which have so often responded to the tones of sympathy. But I have the consolation to reflect, that the purposes of those, at whose request I address you, are infinitely more pure and exalted, than the mere indulgence of curiosity, or gratification of taste. I am persuaded, that the subject possesses too much intrinsic interest, and is too deeply interwoven with the best and strongest feelings of your hearts, to require any adventitious aid. I would, therefore, appeal at once to your hearts, and to your understandings, to that pure, glowing, and enthusiastic benevolence, that strong and inextin-

guishable attachment to the great cause of humanity, that enlightened and efficient intelligence, which are the true characteristics of exalted minds, in the pursuit of illustrious objects.

The success, which has already attended the efforts of the Humane Society, has afforded at once the proudest triumphs to science, and the most animating prospects to philanthropy. The medical philosopher has been led more eagerly to explore the sources, to investigate the laws, to scrutinize the phenomena, and unfold the principle of animal life, more cautiously to question all ambiguous indications of its extinction, and, by ingenious and well conducted experiments, to discover the most efficacious means of rekindling the just expiring spark of life. In this brilliant career, however, I can only follow the scientific adventurer with distant, silent admiration. But the investigation of the laws, which regulate our physical economy, and the developement of the mysterious principle of animation, form but a single, although a highly interesting branch of the considerations connected with this subject. Leaving, therefore, these discussions, to those who are infinitely more competent to conduct them, I shall confine myself wholly to the moral views, to the benign influences on the heart, and the character, which the subject is so admirably fitted to inspire.

Men, in associating for benevolent purposes, not only increase the power of effecting the immediate

and direct objects of their union, but by cherishing an habitual compassion for the wants and sufferings of others, preserve and diffuse that delicate sense of justice, and that tenderness of sensibility, which are in danger of being obliterated, amidst the cares and attractions of active life. How interesting to the philanthropist, enlarging his view, and embracing in his contemplation, the whole extent of human character and condition, strongly to impress on man the predominant conviction, that he is not an insulated and independent being, acting for himself alone, but the member of a widely extended family, the part of one great whole, a joint partaker in the common blessings of providence, aspiring to the same hopes, subject to the same wants, exposed to the same calamities, possessing the same powers, affections, and feelings, with his fellow man ? How beneficial an exercise of the heart, to cherish and invigorate that powerful principle of universal sympathy, which, originating in the tenderest affections of domestic life, embraces at length in the arms of its charity, every individual of the human race ?

However we may lament, we must, I think, admit the tendency of advanced civilization and refinement, of the union of men into large communities, of the increase of wealth and its attendant luxuries, to impair our sympathy, and to add energy and activity to the selfish passions. Man's attention is solicited by a greater multitude of objects. The avocations

of business, the eagerness of political competition, the artificial gaiety of fashionable life, render him insensible to the purer, but less obtrusive joys, that flow from the exercise of the mild and tender affections. His desires are awakened, by more alluring and seductive forms of pleasure. His anger and revenge are enkindled, by keener feelings of indignation, more refined, perhaps more fastidious notions of honor, and more frequent occasions of collision. His avarice is excited by more magnificent displays of wealth, and his ambition is stimulated to madness by the lustre of renown, and the blaze of power. Are we thence rashly to conclude, that civilization and refinement are to be discouraged, the progress of society impeded, that the passions are to be eradicated or paralized, that they may not become morbid or corrupt, that man is to remain an idiot, or a savage, that he may not degenerate into the slave of selfishness ? No ; far different are the conclusions of the wise, the intelligent and humane. They believe, and know, that these powers were implanted in the mind for wise and beneficent purposes, but that they may and ought to be modified and controuled, by the exercise of disinterested and diffusive benevolence, by the principles of pure and sound morality, and the feelings of sublime and elevated piety. It is only by the diligent excitement and full display of all his principles, powers and faculties, that the soul of man can expand to those just and perfect propor-

tions of symmetry and of strength, of which it is capable. But it is our glory, and our consolation, that man is peculiarly the creature of impressions. Other animals, although indued with wonderful faculties, by a beneficent Creator, do yet proceed whole and perfect from his hand, without the capacity of progressive improvement. But to man it belongs to give form and color to his own condition, to become the architect of his own character, to weave the web of his own destiny. Allied at once to earth and to heaven, it remains for himself to determine, whether by suffering his latent faculties to lie dormant, by permitting his mere animal character to become predominant, he shall lie down in the dust with the brutes that perish; or whether, by a full developement of the higher powers of his understanding, his imagination, and his heart, he shall exalt himself to a rank, in the scale of being, little lower than the angels.

It is by thus contemplating the sublime destination and expansive powers of man, that we are enabled to form some conception of that perfect standard of moral excellence, at which, indeed, it is impossible for mortals to arrive, but towards which it is their duty and their glory to approximate. We are taught the possibility, nay the interest, and immense importance, of ennobling and perfecting the character of our species, in modifying, softening and embellishing those grosser passions, which minister to the gratification of self, by a diligent culture of those finer and more

exalted feelings, which embrace the happiness of others.

In considering the means, by which any extensive plan, for the relief of human wretchedness, is to be effected, a little observation will convince us, that success is not the result of idle speculation, of feeble hopes, and indolent good wishes, but the fair fruit of ardent and unconquerable zeal, of patient and persevering industry. Such designs, to be successful, must obtain the concurrence, if not the cordial co-operation, of public opinion. But there is in masses of mind, as of matter, a sort of *vis inertia*, an aversion to change, a disposition to rest immoveable upon the basis of settled habits, a disposition yielding only to the vigorous and repeated impulses of superior minds. What is the natural and ordinary course of all beneficial changes of public opinion and feeling? Upon a particular subject, the public mind is enveloped in a cloud of error, of ignorance or of apathy. The prospect is cold and cheerless. The sparks of intelligence, occasionally struck out by scattered individuals, are scarcely perceived amidst the general gloom. But the friends of humanity unite and persevere. The fuel is slowly but diligently gathered, each adds another and another brand to the rising pile, until at length, lighted by a coal from the altar of benevolence, it bursts forth into a vigorous flame, warming, enlightening, and cheering as it blazes.

It is consolatory to reflect that, in the cause of humanity, success, although sometimes slow and remote, is nevertheless certain. If this truth require illustration, we have it in the recent history of society. I allude to the existence of the slave trade, and its partial abolition, as an apposite illustration both of the alarming extent, to which public opinion is in danger of being perverted, and the eventual success of persevering efforts to enlighten it. How ought we to tremble, when we discover the power of interest, of prejudice, of corruption, to darken the mind, and paralize the feelings, of an enlightened, liberal, and benevolent community? Yet such communities had, for ages, tolerated, not to say countenanced and encouraged a traffic, involving one continued series of tremendous crimes. But, thanks to the most indefatigable and unparalleled exertions, that perhaps were ever made, in the cause of mere disinterested benevolence, better principles have been diffused, and better feelings impressed. Men, awakened to a sense of justice and compassion, now shrink with instinctive horror, from the contemplation of a picture, which they before viewed with indifference, perhaps with complacency. The righteous cause of the injured African has been vindicated, with an eloquence, a zeal, an unshrinking fortitude, and unconquerable perseverance, that does infinite honor, not only to its advocates, but to human nature. Yes, long shall the names of Wilberforce and of Clarkson be re-

membered and repeated, in the peaceful villages of Africa, until her native sons shall learn to emulate the virtues, whilst they aspire to the attainments of such illustrious men.

I am happy in adding another instance of the success of benevolent exertion, in the bosom of this community. Reflecting men had long felt and lamented the want of a suitable establishment, for the protection, perhaps the relief and recovery of those objects of compassion, who are labouring under the horrors of mental derangement. If the ardent votary of classic antiquity, dwell with melancholy rapture on the ruins of towns and of cities, with how much keener sensibility will the friend of humanity mourn over the ruins of the human mind? There you behold the useless waste or mischievous excess of those passions and powers, which balanced, sustained and controuled, might have impelled their possessor forward in the bright career of fame, qualified him to shine in camps or in courts, or fitted him for enjoying and diffusing all the charities of domestic life. There you discover the female countenance, which lately brightened with the bloom of beauty, or beamed with the smile of affection, now wrapped in the gloom of settled melancholy. There you witness the bitter wailings of sorrow, the furious ravings of despair,

> "And moody madness, laughing wild,
> "Amidst severest woe."

Alas! can science discover in her abundant stores, no means to reanimate the mind? Are her powers limited to the laws that govern our physical organization, and "can she not minister to a mind diseased?" An object so interesting is worthy of all the exertions of all the friends of humanity. Perhaps to a limited extent it may be effected. To provide a suitable asylum for lunatics, where all possible means might be fairly applied, which ingenuity and solicitude could devise, had long been the favorite object of many benevolent individuals in this Commonwealth. I am now happy in congratulating you upon the success which has partially attended, and which promises soon completely to crown this laudable undertaking. Such indeed was the earnestness, with which this subject was repeatedly pressed upon the public mind, that cold, cautious and calculating men, could not avoid suspecting some sinister purpose, in this benevolent design. But I trust in God the time is not distant, when such men, and all men may know and feel, that no motives are more powerful, no professions more sincere, no exertions more ardent than those, which have for their object, the amelioration of human wretchedness, in all its forms.

But, gentlemen, I should do injustice both to my own feelings, and the merits of the Humane Society, if I did not number this institution among the most successful of those establishments, which have been

founded in wisdom, and fostered with almost parental solicitude, for the single purpose of disinterested benevolence. The history of resuscitation is full of consolation and encouragement. Numerous are the cases, where by drowning, by suffocation, by strangling, by the blast of lighting, the powers of life are suddenly suspended. Yet the archives of this Society, furnish abundant evidence, that in a large class of similar cases, life may be restored. How amiable and excellent the institution, designed to enlarge the resources, to multiply the powers, and to diffuse the knowledge and the practice of so interesting an art!

In most communications of successful cases, which have been made to the Society, you will find them prefaced by remarking, that the attendants were encouraged to the attempt, and directed in the means, by your publications. By reducing the system to short and precise rules, and publishing them in the most popular forms, the process of resuscitation is now familiarly known to the great mass of this people. So far therefore as this process has been known and practised in New England, you have a right to claim its fair and honorable fruits. And gentlemen, is it possible to ask for you a higher reward, than the conscious satisfaction of your own minds, in reflecting on your successful exertions? Take a single case. One of the most awful forms of sudden death is that of suffocation, from the noxious exhalation of coals, placed in a sleeping room. Let me, for

a moment, remind you of the unutterable anguish of a mother's heart, in suddenly discovering, that her darling child has thus fallen a victim to her own excess of tenderness. Suppose its life restored by your means. It were impossible to wish you a nobler recompense, than a participation of her joy, when exclaiming in the enraptured language of the gospel, "my child was lost and is found, was dead and is alive again."

But other objects have claimed your attention. Among them are the huts you have built upon the most exposed parts of the coast, for the shelter of the ship-wrecked mariner, and the life-boat you have constructed, to rescue him from impending death. Upon these subjects, important as they are, I have no time to enlarge. I can only add, that in thus laying broad and deep the foundation, and raising the lofty fabrick of an institution, devoted to the most interesting purposes of benevolence, you erect a monument to the triumph of humanity, more glorious and more imperishable than the brass and the marble, that record the names and achievements of conquerors.

In reviewing the progress of your institution, it is painful to remark how many of your brethren, who had long shared your labors, and partaken your triumphs, have, since your last anniversary, bid adieu to this transitory life. In approaching this part of the subject, I am appalled at the unusual magnitude of the register of death. I find upon it the names of

distinguished statesmen, civilians and orators, of men who had long sustained, with dignity and fidelity, the highest offices, in the tribunals of justice, of men, from whose eloquent lips we had been accustomed to listen to the oracles of truth, and the words of eternal life. We trust they have ascended to the mansions of peace, to enjoy the unfading rewards, promised to the benevolent and the faithful, by that blessed Saviour of men, who himself went about doing good.—Painful as is the recollection, I cannot forbear alluding more particularly to the sudden and melancholy death of a faithful and active officer. Alas! if cultivation of intellect, if purity of heart, if spotless and unsuspected integrity of conduct, if fervent and unaffected piety, if mildness and urbanity of manners could have ensured the steadiness or sustained the authority of reason, your late Secretary had still been with you. Still should we have seen him, seconding with his characteristic zeal and earnestness all your benevolent efforts, and foremost in the promotion of every practicable plan, for the relief and protection of those wretched victims of lunacy, with whom his tender and affectionate heart, would have been the first to sympathize.

Before closing the subject, if I have not already exhausted your patience, permit me to remark the peculiar force with which some of the principles, I have attempted to unfold, apply to the actual condition and circumstances of our own country. In a

country, not only where "the structure of government gives force to public opinion," but where our manners and institutions, our habits of thinking and of acting, give to public opinion supreme and irresistible controul, how important is the duty of regulating and directing the influence of impressions? The prosperity and happiness, nay more, the character and dignity of our country, are infinitely dear to us.

> "Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
> "Who never to himself hath said,
> "This is my own, my native land!"

All that is excellent in science and the arts, all that is interesting in the happiness of social life, all that is amiable and endearing in the cultivation of the best affections, is irrevocably involved with the interests of our country. Viewing its immense extent, and the increasing millions it is destined to sustain, this country may yet be considered as in its infancy. Opinions now imbibed, feelings now cherished, institutions now established, habits now formed, will grow with its growth and strengthen with its strength. Perhaps the dignity and happiness, or the misery and degradation of unborn millions of Americans, may be influenced by the impressions of the present day. This will appear no extravagant supposition to those, who have carefully marked the immense difference in the moral, intellectual and social character of different communities, arising wholly from

difference of culture. But it is the misfortune of the present age, to witness the most tremendous experiment upon the flexibility of human character, that the world has ever exhibited. In alluding to the ferocious despotism, that has desolated the fairest portions of Europe, let me earnestly hope, that no party feeling will be imputed to me. God forbid, that on this solemn occasion, I should cherish or impart an ungenerous prejudice, so inauspicious to its design. But, as the humble advocate of the cause of humanity, whose interests are this day entrusted to my charge, it is impossible not to feel, and it would be a dereliction of duty not to express, the deepest abhorrence of a despotism, equally at war with the dictates of justice, the precepts of religion, and the rights of humanity. Struggling for the preservation of life, shall we patiently see the lives of millions of innocents sacrificed without remorse, to satiate the rapacity of individual ambition? This oppressive system, not content with enslaving the persons, seeks to fetter and to manacle the minds of men. The intellectual powers are made to flow in artificial channels, and to concentrate in a single point, that of impressing an unqualified admiration of despotic power and submission to its will. Whilst the camp and the court, the halls of justice and of science, of literature and the arts, resound with forced and venal acclamations of applause, the infant lip is taught to lisp the accents of adulation. All the rays of genius, of

learning and of taste, even the cheering and benignant beams of religion, are forcibly diverted and artificially disposed, merely to throw a deeper shade and a stronger light upon the picture of imperial magnificence.—In the formation of character, with what anxious solicitude should we guard our imaginations and our hearts against the imposing splendor and destructive influence of such an example? With what firmness ought we to resist the approaches of that ignorance and error, that corruption and perversion, in which alone such a system could have found support? With what assiduity should we cherish that freedom of thought and of communication, that sustained fortitude of character, and that sobriety and tenderness of feeling, which form the best security against the encroachments of ambition?

I should be treacherous to the cause of humanity, if I did not invoke to its aid the influence of my fair countrywomen. If that love of truth and of nature, that ardent benevolence and expansive sympathy, from which alone the cause of humanity can hope for support, are to be found on earth in purity and simplicity, it is in the bosom of the amiable, accomplished and intelligent female. Retiring and unobtrusive, her influence, in point of numbers, is not perhaps extensive, but within the sphere of its operation, it is powerful and decisive. To her it belongs to unfold the powers of the infant mind, to instil the earliest precepts of virtue, to impress the earliest

feelings of humanity, to form at once the understanding, the imagination and the heart. Hers is the delightful task, and let me add, the imperious duty, to temper heroic fortitude with the gentleness of compassion, and manly vigor of understanding with the tenderest affections of the heart.

In conclusion. How infinitely enhanced is the value of that diffusive beneficence, whose province it is to exalt the human character, when hallowed and consecrated by the sublime and animating hope of immortality? No stronger motive can possibly be urged, to its constant and diligent cultivation, than that derived from the confident assurances of religion, that the impressions of this life shall not be obliterated in the tomb, that this is but the infancy of being, the seed-time of existence, that the germ of character here formed, shall unfold, and bloom, and ripen, in the cloudless regions of everlasting day.

FINIS.

NOTE. Among the deceased members, alluded to in this discourse, were Hon. William Cushing, late Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, and one of the associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States; Hon. Francis Dana, late Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts; Rev. Dr. Eckley; Rev. William Emerson, and Edward Gray, Esq. late Recording Secretary of the Humane Society.

APPENDIX.

PREMIUMS

Adjudged by the Society, from June 14, 1810, *to June* 11, 1811.

NATHANIEL CHEEVER, for plunging into the Mill Creek, and taking up a boy, Horatio Coggswell, in danger of drowning . . . 4
F. Rhenhard, for taking a child out of the water 2
William Symmes, for saving a child from drowning 5
Samuel Tittle, for taking a child out of the water 2
William Emmons, for taking a girl from the water, who had fallen from a platform and sunk twice before any assistance could be obtained . 5
William Colman and Christopher Joseph, for their exertions in saving a number of men who were overset in a gondola which was passing from South Boston bridge to the glass house . 5
Levi Stoddard, for taking up capt. Stairs from a wreck, who was in a perishing condition . 10
Silas Hathaway of Plymouth, for his benevolent exertions, &c. 10
John Williams, for assisting in taking up several men whose boat had been overset near an Island 5
Capt George Hull, for taking up a man who had fallen into the town dock, and who was in danger of perishing with the cold . . . 4
Also a dollar to each of the watchmen who assisted him in his humane exertions . . . 3
George Kitchen and Nathaniel Carter, for their exertions in saving a number of men, who were in danger of drowning in Charles river . 6
Alpheus Bush, for saving a boy who had fallen from a vessel at Lewis's wharf . . . 2
Alexander Lovell, for saving a boy from drowning 5

$ 68

EXPENCES OF THE SOCIETY FROM JUNE, 1810, TO JUNE, 1811.

Semi-annnal meeting	22	
Printer's bill for printing 700 copies of proceedings for two years.	80	
For a gold medal	10	
Bill, repairing the huts in Boston harbour	28	76
Titus Bascom's bill, for repairing the huts on Orleans Beach	10	
Capt. Jacob Weston, for repairing the huts on Duxbury beach	5	75
For building a hut on Situate beach	110	
William Hunt, messenger of Branch Bank	2	
Joseph Callender, for printing 100 certificates	3	50
Messenger of the Society	54	27
	$326	28
Premiums	68	
	$394	28

PROPERTY OF THE SOCIETY.

Massachusetts state note			1963	92
Union Bank stock			3600	
Six per cent. United States,	3179 07		1780	
Three per cent.	791 25		520	
Deferred stock	675 36		540	
West Boston Bridge, 2 shares			300	
Malden Bridge, with ten shares of Chelsea Bridge attached to it			800	
			$9503	92

BOSTON, December 10, 1810.

WE the subscribers, appointed a committee to examine the Treasurer's accounts, find all articles vouched, the same right cast, and a balance of $523, 85 due to the Society, and the evidences of the property above enumerated.

JOHN HANCOCK.
EBENEZER WITHINGTON.

OFFICERS OF THE SOCIETY.

JOHN WARREN, M.D. *President.*
JOHN LATHROP, D.D. *Vice President.*
AARON DEXTER, M.D. *Second Vice President.*
JOHN ELIOT, D.D. *Treasurer.*
WILLIAM SPOONER, M.D. *Corresponding Secretary.*
CHARLES DAVIS, Esq. *Recording Secretary.*

TRUSTEES.

SAMUEL PARKMAN, Esq.
WILLIAM PHILLIPS, Esq.
JOSEPH COOLIDGE, Esq.
SAMUEL BRADFORD, Esq.
BENJAMIN RICH, Esq.
REV. JOSEPH BUCKMINSTER.

DECEASED MEMBERS

Maj. John Barrett, *Quincy.*
Mr. George Baylies.
Mr. John W. Blanchard.
Mr. Thomas Burley.
Francis D. Channing, Esq.
Benjamin Clark, Esq.
Charles Cushing, Esq.
Hon. William Cushing,
Hon. Francis Dana,
Rev. Joseph Eckley, D. D.
Rev. William Emerson,
Mr. Abraham W. Gamage.
Edward Gray, Esq.
Joseph Greenleaf, Esq.
Mr. Oliver Hartshorn.
Capt. William V. Hutchins.
Capt. Mungo Mackay.

OMITTED IN THE LAST LIST OF NAMES.

Hon. Benjamin Homans,
Mr. Ephraim Locke.
James White, Esq.

NEW MEMBERS.

Mr. John Bradford.
Stephen Codman, Esq.
Mr. George Darracott.
Mr. John Fessenden.
Mr. John B. Fitch.
Levi Hedge, *Professor of Logic, Ethics, &c. Cambridge.*
Rev. Horace Holley.
Rev. Abiel Holmes, D. D. *Cambridge.*
Samuel F. M'Cleary, Esq.
Mr. Edmund Munroe.
Hon. William Prescott, Esq.
Mr. William T. Salter.